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environment and development

Dear Students,

Last year, a group of young people came to the United Nations to observe Earth Day. A five-year-old girl brought us a little card. On it she wrote: "If the Earth were not here, we would not be. So, we should take care of it. It is getting dirty, so you better clean it up." The words were simple, but her message was clear: if we don't care about our environment and its resources, human development will suffer. * The environment is where we live. It is the air we breathe, the water we drink, the soil that grows our food and gives us minerals; it is all living beings that surround us. Development is what we do with these resources to improve our lives. All over the world we do things that we believe will make our lives better, but everything we do changes our environment. * Sometimes we don't see how we are connected to the Earth and to each other, but the connections are there. Medicines that save lives in Germany may depend on plants that grow in the forests of Costa Rica. Pollution from automobiles in London or Mexico City may affect the climate in Rabat or Tokyo. We now know that carbon dioxide and other gases from factories and cars cause the atmosphere to heat up. This rise of temperature may change the world's climate. Forests help clear the air of carbon dioxide, but many forests are being cut down for their wood or to clear land for farms. * We often damage our environment by having too much or too little. For example, many people in the world's richer countries don't worry about having enough fuel to heat or to cool their homes or to cook their meals. An abundance of things is produced for them by factories and laboratories. In fact, one person in a very rich country uses as much energy as 80 people in a very poor country. Overconsumption leads to waste which pollutes our environment and uses up our resources. * On the other hand, in poorer countries, most people depend on nature for their livelihood. Crushing poverty and growing populations create great pressure on the environment. When land and forests which provide food, natural resources and work are exhausted, people find it harder, and sometimes impossible, to survive. Many go to cities, crowding into unhealthy and unsafe slums. * If poor people are forced to destroy their environment to survive, all countries will suffer the consequences. Many developing countries are trying hard to give their people opportunities to improve their lives while preserving the environment. They cannot succeed unless the world's richer countries support and assist those efforts. * At the United Nations, Governments work together to improve conditions of life in all countries, while making sure the Earth will be healthy for the future. A United Nations world conference—Earth Summit '92—will be held in Brazil in June 1992 to discuss how rich and poor countries can protect the environment and also improve people's lives through development. * Earth is our only home. The least we can do to protect it is to learn how our actions affect the environment, and how much we all depend on our planet and on each other.

Javier Pérez de Cuéllar
Secretary-General

development and the environment

UNITED NATIONS

development

Economic development depends on resources we get from nature: air, water, sun, soil and minerals. But our resources are often destroyed by human activity. When our environment becomes poor, development suffers.

environment and development

save more, waste less

Each day we throw away many things. Old newspapers, broken toys, used clothes, shopping bags, cans and bottles. They end up as garbage. Whenever we discard something, we are actually throwing away valuable material. For example, paper is made from trees, plastic from oil and cans from aluminium or tin.

Everyone can help to save our resources by recycling. Recycling means reusing things. In many countries, recycling is a daily habit. Used books and toys are given to others. Old clothes are used as rags for cleaning. Plastic pots store seeds. Old newspapers make paper containers. Even nature recycles. When plants and animals die, they fertilize the soil or become coal and oil.

In many countries, recycling is done mechanically. New paper is made from old. If you recycle one ton of paper, you can save 17 trees. Cans are crushed and melted to make new products. Old metal can be melted to make steel for cars. If there are recycling centres nearby, collect used items and take them there. You can even organize your class to do so.

getting together

Schoolchildren in *Sweden* have bought and preserved 65,000 hectares (approximately 160,000 acres) of forest in Costa Rica with money they earned by recycling paper and cans. Young Costa Ricans, in turn, have built in the heart of a forest a new centre to train themselves in conservation.

At a school in *New Jersey, USA*, students protested against plastic trays being used in their cafeteria. They demanded trays made from recycled paper which causes less damage to the environment than plastic. They even petitioned the Board of Education. As a result of their campaign, plastic trays were eliminated not only from their school, but also from their town.

In *East Kalimantan, Indonesia*, local scouts replanted a 1,200-acre forest that was destroyed in a fire. They raised money to buy seedlings. Experts sent by the Government advised them on what and where to plant, and how to care for the young trees. Today, East Kalimantan has a new forest which the scouts visit regularly to tend the saplings.

In *Lamorde, Niger*, schoolchildren grow their own rice and millet in the rainy season and vegetables in the dry season. They do all the work themselves: clearing, planting, transplanting, weeding and harvesting. Their success has inspired students in 80 other schools all over the country to start their own gardens.

how you can help the environment

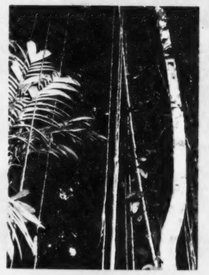
1. Use paper wisely. Write on both sides.
2. Protect ponds and rivers. When you visit a beach, keep it clean.
3. Save energy. Turn off electric lights whenever possible.
4. Reuse containers.
5. Help save endangered animals. Don't buy or use objects made from fur, ivory, reptile skin or tortoise shell.
6. Save water. If there are leaky faucets in your house or you find a broken pipeline, tell an adult who can get it fixed.
7. Take care of trees. Plant new ones and protect them from damage.
8. Walk or use public transportation. If your family has a car, encourage your parents to limit its use.
9. Read books about our Earth. Share with your friends what you have learned.
10. Form your own nature club. Invite your friends to clean up the neighbourhood.

trees are our friends

It took 8 million years for the dinosaurs to disappear. Today, animals and insects are disappearing at a much quicker rate. Each year we lose between 10,000 and 35,000 species. Most die when forests, their natural home, are destroyed.

When forests are cleared, the earth becomes poorer. Forests affect the climate, protect the soil from erosion and help control floods. Firewood is also the only source of fuel for almost half of the world's population. When trees are cut down, rains easily wash away valuable topsoil in which all our food is grown. As a result, the earth becomes unusable for farming.

Trees are our friends. When we cut down a tree, we should plant a new one in its place. We should use our remaining forest resources more wisely.



Most deserts are created from large-scale destruction of forests and misuse of land. The Sahara, for example, was once green. Today, it is the largest desert on Earth. We have not learned from the past. Today, we destroy an area of rainforest the size of a football field every second. Unless we are careful, forests will totally disappear in many countries.

water, water, everywhere...

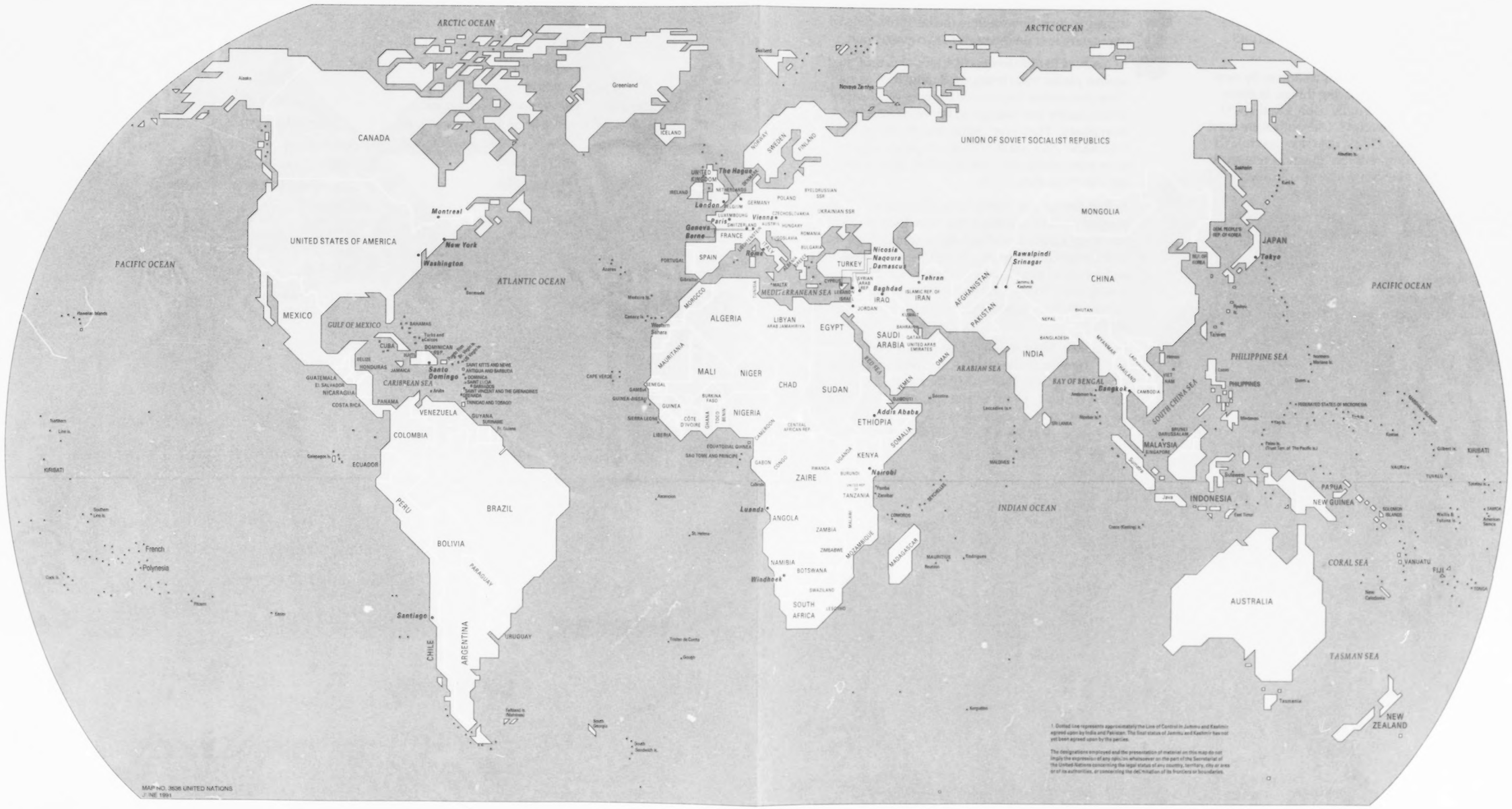
Three quarters of the Earth's surface is covered by water in mighty oceans and seas, great rivers and lakes. But we can only drink less than 1 per cent of this water, mainly that found in lakes, rivers and underground. The rest is either salty sea water or ice, frozen in glaciers and the polar ice caps.

Life on Earth depends on water. Unfortunately, much of our water is being polluted. In many countries, waste is simply dumped into rivers and lakes. Human sewage also ends up in the water.

People in many developing countries do not have enough safe drinking water, due to scarcity and pollution. Thousands of children die daily from diseases borne by dirty water.

As we cannot increase the total volume of the Earth's water, we should conserve our supply and keep its sources clean. Even a simple action such as turning off the tap while brushing your teeth can save two gallons of water.

united nations map of the world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St. Helena
Ascension
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SOUTH CHINA SEA
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PAPUA NEW GUINEA
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Wallis & Futuna Is.
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Aleutian Is.
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Christmas Island
Cocos (Keeling) Is.
East Timor
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Java
Sumatra
Andaman Is.
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Seychelles
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Kerguelen
Tristan da Cunha
Gough I.
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South Georgia
South Sandwich Is.
St. Helena
Ascension
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Nicobar Is.
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Southern Cook Is.
Galapagos Is
Easter I.
Pitcairn I.
Cook Is.
Line Is.
French Polynesia
Fernandez Islands
Trinidad and Tobago
Guyana
Suriname
Fr. Guiana
Aruba
Netherlands Antilles

suggestions for teachers

One of the most urgent concerns of our time is the relationship between environment and development. These suggestions are intended to stimulate your own ideas on teaching about the subject and to help your students to understand their part in today's world.

1 why? GOALS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Teachers have found the connection between environment and development to be an exciting and rewarding theme to teach. It is at once global and local, scientific and social. It deals with basic needs and the quality of life. It does not have to seem vast and remote, but can relate in specific ways to the students' daily lives. Young people care deeply about the environment, each person's right to a decent life, and the kind of world they will inherit.

Aspects of this theme fit readily into almost every curriculum, even at the primary level. It helps students see how the United Nations works and feel that their local efforts are important.

Learning about environment and development helps students:

* understand the important connection between environment and development;
* appreciate and care for the environment;
* recognize the global nature of both environment and development and the role of the United Nations in dealing with them;
* develop a sense of how their own actions affect others now and in the future.

2 what? FOCUS AND THEMES

Several concepts stand out when teaching about environment and development:

The ideal: A world community in which each person enjoys an equal right to a full life.

The reality: The foundation for a world community has been laid, but injustice still exists at every level of life:

* The Earth is a single system of which men, women and children are a part.
* People have common material and social needs which they meet in different ways in different environments.
* Development and economic growth depend on resources we derive from nature.
* Because of geographical and political reasons, resources are unequally distributed.
* Resources are being depleted through excessive consumption, waste, widespread poverty, population growth and industrialization.

The linkage between environment and development: Development depends on how we manage our natural resources. Modern technology and industrialization have greatly improved the lives of some people. However, the methods chosen for development have often wasted the world's natural resources, polluted our air and water and endangered the global environment. On the other hand, poverty burdens developing countries, where people often destroy their immediate environment in order to survive. Rapid population growth puts additional pressure on the environment.

A transition to sustainable development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs is essential for our survival. This means:

* using natural resources carefully so that we conserve more and waste less;
* ensuring a sustainable level of population;
* developing technology responsive to our environmental concerns;
* meeting essential needs for food, water, energy, education, jobs and sanitation;
* changing lifestyles which lead to overconsumption and waste particularly among the world's more affluent people.

3 how? APPROACHES AND METHODS

Multidisciplinary education: Environment and development fit naturally into many different subject areas. In *History*, for example, students may explore our evolving relationship to the environment. In *Cultural Studies*, they can study how indigenous peoples and societies, who are not yet dependent on "modern" machinery, view this relationship. The forces at work in the interaction between human beings and the biosphere can be taken up in *Science*. *Civics* can include environment and development in its teaching of social and political rights, responsibilities and institutions. All these areas can be enriched by the study of the relevant work of the United Nations.

Local focus: Your students' local situation will determine the themes you choose and the way you use this leaflet. It is best to narrow the focus. Explore and research some aspect of environment and development of concern to the home community, then compare it to another society and the world community.

Active methods: Action is essential to learning about environment and development. The leaflet describes some projects being undertaken by young people which bring to life global concerns and teach social responsibility and cooperation for the common good. Pupils should learn that positive action is taking place at many levels and what they are doing locally is contributing to world-wide efforts.

4 where? RESOURCES

Sensitivity to and love of Nature can be learned directly from the environment. For example, school gardens teach the natural growing cycle.

The local community is the principal resource for teaching about environment and development.

Non-governmental organizations of all kinds—environmental, scientific, professional and industrial—are increasingly including environment and development in their public information materials.

In addition, the United Nations and its related agencies are producing publications for the Conference on Environment and Development—Earth Summit '92. United Nations materials can be obtained from the *Public Inquiries Unit, Department of Public Information, United Nations, NY, 10017*, or from your nearest United Nations Information Centre or Service. Audio-visual materials can be obtained from the film libraries of United Nations information centres or by writing to *Audio-Visual Promotion and Distribution, Department of Public Information, United Nations NY 10017.*

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